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***Request for Approval of the California Environmental Quality Act Responsible Agency Findings and Grant Award for the Grizzly Slough Floodplain Restoration Project at the Cosumnes River Preserve***

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**Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Board consider the Final Environmental Impacts Report and Addendum prepared by the California Department of Water Resources as the lead agency in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and adopt Resolution 2018-03 which makes Responsible Agency Findings that all necessary mitigation measures have been included in the project to eliminate any significant effects on the environment, and that no additional mitigation measures within the Board's authority are necessary.

Contingent upon adoption of the Responsible Agency Findings, staff recommends that the Board approve a grant award of \$8,700,800.00 to the Department of Water Resources for the Grizzly Slough Floodplain Restoration Project at the Cosumnes River Preserve and authorize the Executive Officer to execute a grant agreement.

**Recommendation Description**

The Board reserved \$8,700,800 for the project at the March 28, 2018 Board meeting with a deadline of October 1, 2018 for the project proponents to complete the CEQA process and fulfill the other conditions placed on the award (see Agenda Item 6: Proposition 1 Grant Program Update for more information on conditions), which they have done. Therefore, Conservancy staff is ready to move into the grant agreement negotiation process should the Board approve the grant request.

On October 21, 2010, the California Department of Water Resources, as the lead agency, made findings in an Environmental Impact Report stating that the project would have significant effects; that most of these effects could be mitigated with the adoption of a Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting Program; and prepared a Statement of Overriding Considerations where they addressed the few effects that could not be mitigated as so minor in nature and short in duration that the project was still viable. On September 27, 2018, the California Department of Water Resources, as the lead agency, completed an addendum to the Environmental Impact Report to address changes in the project design. This addendum concludes that the revised project would have no environmental impacts that are not already identified in the final Environmental Impact Report.

The Delta Conservancy, as a Responsible Agency, has reviewed these documents and findings, and staff recommends that the Board make Responsible Agency Findings concluding that all necessary mitigation measures have been included in the project to eliminate significant effects on the environment. Staff further recommends that the Delta Conservancy Board approve the requested grant and authorize the Executive Officer to execute a grant agreement.

### **Project Background**

The project will restore natural habitat to a 489-acre site. This will be accomplished by breaching the levee on Grizzly Slough, excavating channels from the breach, and planting the area with native vegetation. The project has been designed to maintain tidal flows year-round to eliminate the risk of salmonid stranding, and to allow for natural recruitment of riparian vegetation. In addition to natural recruitment, the project will be planted with native vegetation. The floodplain's long-term trajectory will be toward riparian forest. A new setback levee will be constructed along the south property boundary to provide equivalent flood protection pre- and post-project. An agricultural zone (157 ac) will be established on the higher elevation south area, and enhanced with new water supply infrastructure to allow cultivation of irrigated crops (corn) to provide wildlife benefits and revenue. Long-term management (weed control, monitoring) will be accomplished by Cosumnes River Preserve staff, with funding from the agricultural lease. These actions will result in the establishment of a variety of habitats including floodplain, riparian forest, valley oak woodland, upland terrestrial, and wildlife friendly agriculture. These habitats will benefit a wide range of species including Sandhill Cranes, native salmonids, Giant Gartersnake, Swainson's Hawks, and many others. Additionally, this project will result in flood protection benefits for the surrounding landowners.

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